**Syllabus for Artful Meditation**

**Dates:** Wednesdays, June 4, 11, 18, 25, 2025, 9.45-11 AM EST, Virtual

**Course description**:

In this virtual study group, participants will experience works of modern art through meditations led by yoga teacher Aparna Sadananda, followed by discussions facilitated by Donna Jonte, a museum educator. Artful meditations are interactive guided meditations integrated with art education. Each session begins with a 30-minute meditation in which the teachings of yoga and meditation are woven into slow, visual engagement with the thematic and formal qualities of an artwork. The meditations will prepare us to examine the artist’s life, artistic methods, and historical/social context while we share observations, questions, and interpretations.

You may learn more about the benefits of artful meditation [here](https://www.innerstillnesswithaparna.com/about-1).

All are welcome. No prior experience is necessary.

**Course Modules**:

1) Module 1, June 4, 2025: “Seeing" Art through *Asanas*

In this session, we will engage with Sam Taylor Johnson's *Self-Portrait as a Tree* through yoga postures called *Asanas.*  Modifications will be offered to make this accessible to all. As we practice the Tree Pose (*vrikshasana*), we will explore the inner landscape of the artist and find strategies for developing our own flexibility and persistence.

2) Module 2, June 11, 2025: "Seeing" Art through *Pranayama*

Focusing on Lou Stovall's *A Suite for Sergei* and a housetop-patterned quilt,we will learn various breathwork techniques (*Pranayama*) to develop perspectives for exploring artworks and connecting to our inner and outer worlds.

3) Module 3, June 18, 2025: "Seeing" Art through our voice

We will practice vocal toning with seed syllables, called *bija mantras* in yoga. We will employ this powerful technique, similar to mantra chanting, to appreciate Joan Mitchell's *August, Rue Daguerre.*

4) Module 4, June 25, 2025: "Seeing" through *mudras* and expressing through the written word

In the last session of the course, we will meditate on Vincent Van Gogh's "The Poet's Garden" guided by the *yama* *Ahimsa* (non-harming), a precept that offers guidelines on our treatment of all living beings. After learning hand gestures (*mudras)*, we will journal or write poetry inspired by *The Poet's Garden.*

**Course Leaders**

Aparna Sadananda, Ph.D., formerly a cellular neuroscience researcher, is a yoga teacher based in Washington, DC, who leads meditation programs for Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art and yoga classes and trainings for Yoga District. Visit her at <https://www.innerstillnesswithaparna.com/>

Donna Jonte recently retired from her position as Head of Experiential Learning at The Phillips Collection and continues to develop and implement programs linking art and wellness. Named DC Art Educator of the Year in 2019 by the local affiliate of the National Art Education Association, Donna has a master’s in teaching from George Mason University and a master’s in English Literature from Mills College.

Aparna and Donna have worked together since 2020 designing and teaching art and mindfulness programs. At The Phillips Collection they collaborated with an art history professor and a Unitarian minister on Nature-Spirit-Art, a 6-week, in-person course on art and climate change, and, from March 2020 to March 2025, on Art-based Meditation, a weekly, online exploration of artwork through guided meditation and discussion. They have presented at national conferences on building empathy through art-based meditation and co-wrote a chapter for the forthcoming book *An Empathy-Building Toolkit for Museums,* edited by Elif M. Gokcigdem (American Alliance of Museums & Bloomsbury, 2026).